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SUBJECT: CODEL MARSHALL MEETS WITH MALIAN PRESIDENT

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1.(SBU) SUMMARY: On August 27 the Ambassador and a six member delegation led by Congressman Jim Marshall met with Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure. The President said Mali had the human resources to confront Al Q'Aida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) but needed resources and regional cooperation to be successful. Congressman Earl Pomeroy congratulated President Toure for his commitment to democracy, calling him Mali's George Washington. The President expressed confidence that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton would place Mali on the itinerary for their next visit to Africa. End summary.

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

2.(SBU) On August 27 the Ambassador and a Congressional delegation led by Congressman Jim Marshall and including Congressmen Earl Pomeroy, Frank LoBiondo, David Wu, Bill Shuster, and Timothy Walz met with Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT). House Armed Services Committee staff members Mark Lewis and Lynn Williams also were present.

3.(SBU) Marshall thanked the President for receiving the delegation. He noted that Democrats and Republicans are united in support for Mali's stability, particularly with respect to the regional fight against Al Q'Aida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the nation's economic development. ATT thanked the United States for the training it has offered many of its military officers as well as the dropping of supplies when Malian troops were surrounded in September 2007 by Tuareg rebels in Tinzaouatene, near the border with Algeria. He asked for additional training such as the biannual regional Flintlock exercises and the Joint Combined Exchange Training.

AQIM PROBLEM IN NEED OF A REGIONAL RESPONSE

4.(SBU) The President said that AQIM was originally an Algerian phenomenon, but that the problem had turned regional, and that AQIM fighters, trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan, were well-equipped, mobile, and very dangerous. He said that AQIM is funded chiefly by trafficking of arms, narcotics, and people, as well as hostage-taking for ransom. Most of their recruiting takes place in Mauritania, and most recruits are not driven by ideology, but are simply mercenaries.

5.(SBU) Until recently, countries of the region had chosen to pursue AQIM individually, rather than as a group. When pressure increased in one country, AQIM was able to move somewhere else. The President described his efforts to get foreign ministers of the region together to discuss a joint action plan, a draft communique, and a draft declaration. The countries of the region decided to wait until the end of Ramadan, to organize a heads of state meeting in Bamako, which he expects will take place in October or November. The President described the distraction of the Tuareg rebellion as behind him, with Tuareg rebels integrated in the army and weapons surrendered.

6.(SBU) The President asked for a variety of materiel, including customs equipment, vehicles for the gendarmerie and police, communications equipment, helmets, and bullet proof vests. He spoke of the need to refurbish a former NATO air base at Tessalit so that two to three regiments could be stationed there so as to prevent AQIM from gaining a foothold in Mali.

IRREGULAR FORCES

7.(SBU) Marshall said he heard the President's message. He noted that if AQIM were to embed in Northern Mali, it would be very bad for the country, and he hoped that the Malian people understood the importance of the fight, as the President did. He said that irregular forces who knew the terrain could be successful in confronting a threat like what the President is experiencing in the North of Mali, and cited the example of Ramadi, Iraq, which in December 2006 was under serious threat from Al Q'Aida forces. By repairing cell phone towers so Sunnis opposed to Al Q'Aida could communicate with the Iraqi government and by providing vehicles and rifles to Sunni irregulars fighting Al Q'Aida, the situation stabilized to the point that U.S. personnel could walk safely on the streets of Ramadi by summer 2007.

8.(SBU) The President said each faction in the North is willing to offer 50 of their youth to be trained and integrated into the military to fight against AQIM. He said they know the region, they know the people, and if the Government of Mali does not take them, the Salafists (AQIM) or criminal elements will do so. He described Malian government dialogue with the Salafists in which the latter claimed they are engaged in a war against the United States and the West, not Mali. Malian government representatives replied that Mali shares Western values and questioned what the Salafists were doing uninvited on Malian territory. He mentioned recent firefights with AQIM, noting that they were good fighters equipped with advanced

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equipment such as night vision goggles which allowed them to attack and kill 29 Malian troops recently in a surprise, nighttime attack.

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

9.(SBU) Pomeroy said that Mali faces a number of serious problems requiring a leader of courage and character like the President. Pomeroy said President Toure's military background is helpful in the fight against AQIM. He called the President the George Washington of Mali, a military leader who respects democracy and is willing to step aside and let others rule out of respect for the constitution. He characterized Mali's fifth democratic election as extremely important for the future of the nation. Turning to Mali's Millennium Challenge Account, Pomeroy said he was determined to make it a success and point of honor for Mali as well as for the United States, noting that the program would continue to be followed closely by Congress. Pomeroy said that former Malian Ambassador to the United States Diop was a great asset.

10.(SBU) The President thanked Pomeroy for his efforts to get the Millennium Challenge compact signed, calling him the godfather of Mali's MCC program. He noted that if he were ever to have the opportunity to tell President Obama what priorities to continue to support, he would cite the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the extremely effective President's Malaria Initiative, literacy and education programs, and the innovative Millennium Challenge Corporation. He said Malians are not jealous that the President and Secretary of State bypassed Mali on their first visits to the African continent, and they are confident the nation will be on the itinerary for the next visit.

11.(SBU) Congressman Marshall did not have the opportunity to clear this message before departing.

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